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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

22 March 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

SUBJECT: Reactions to Certain US Courses in Laos

Attached for your information is a memorandum entitled, "Reactions to Certain US Courses in Laos," together with a copy [redacted] 50X1

Copies of the memorandum have been furnished to the Secretary of Defense and to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Chester L. Cooper

CHESTER L. COOPER
Deputy Assistant Director
National Estimates

DISTRIBUTION A-MINUS

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

20 March 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: Reactions to Certain US Courses in Laos

1. The problem is to estimate certain reactions if the US, in order to put pressure on General Phouni and Premier Boun Oum to cooperate in a coalition government, halted aid to the Laotian government and withdrew its MAAG teams.

2. If the US were to withdraw its training teams, military advisers and, most importantly, its logistics backup of the Laotian army, the Communist forces now in Laos (19,000 Pathet Lao and 9,000 North Vietnamese) would have the capability rapidly to defeat the Laotian government forces and to seize the major urban areas remaining in government hands. However, we do not believe that the Communists would immediately attempt to take over Laos by military means.

3. Those on the Communist side -- Moscow, Peiping, Hanoi, and the Pathet Lao -- want a Communist Laos. They would probably believe that their chances of success by political means were

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greatly enhanced by the US move. In these circumstances, all four would probably seek to pursue that objective primarily through political action rather than through military conquest. Moreover, the Soviets would wish to maintain the appearance of having negotiated in good faith for the creation of a coalition government. In any event, the Communist forces in Laos will continue to maintain military pressures on the government forces, and they will increase that pressure from time to time to improve their political leverage.

4. The assumed US course of action would have an immediate demoralizing effect upon the Laotian government and armed forces. The government could survive at most only three or four months without US financial support, and it is unlikely that Phoumi could hold the armed forces together for long. The Communist side would probably wait for the Laotian government to collapse or for Phoumi and Boun Oum to give in and accept Souvanna's terms for a coalition government.

5. Even if the US were to halt aid and withdraw the MAAG teams, we believe that the chances would be less than even that Boun Oum and Phoumi would agree to join a coalition government headed by Souvanna Phouma. They consider him to be a tool of the

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Communists, and they regard him with distaste and suspicion. If they were to give in and agree to participate in a Souvanna government we do not believe that they would do so with any serious intent of cooperating with Souvanna. Rather they would probably seek to undercut him and his followers as well as the Pathet Lao.

6. There would be at least four other courses open to Phouni and Boun Oum, but it is impossible to estimate with confidence or precision the odds on any of them. The most likely of the four would appear to be to leave Laos in self-imposed exile. Both almost certainly have the means to do so, and they must at times become weary and discouraged with the struggle, as does Souvanna.

7. Their pride and determination, however, may not permit them to withdraw, and they might, unless fully convinced that the US and Thailand would not come to their aid, either move to Savannakhet with whatever government assets they could take with them and seek to bring about a partition of Laos, or initiate some desperate military action. In either of these cases there would be a sharp military reaction by the Communist forces, and Phouni's troops would probably be defeated. It is also possible that Phouni and Boun Oum might go into the hills with some of

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their loyal followers and seek to carry on a guerrilla war against any Laotian government which might be set up. However, neither would relish such a life and they probably could not command the following of many of the Laotian troops for long unless they were assured sources of maintenance and pay. Hence we believe this to be the least likely of the four courses.

FOR THE BOARD OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES:

SHERMAN KENT
Chairman

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SECRET C-O-P-Y

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

The following message from Michael Forrestal addressed to the Director of Central Intelligence and Mr. McGeorge Bundy [redacted] 50X1

S-E-N-S-I-T-I-V-E

The last week in Vientiane [redacted] 50X1

[redacted] bring me to believe that the chances of persuading 50X1

General Phouni by normal means to cooperate at our policy as stated in President's memo to Amb Brown are less than likely to succeed.

It seems probable therefore that President may soon be faced with necessity of considering giving authority to Harriman and Brown to suspend military assistance to RLG even at the risk of seriously weakening FAR ability to resist a renewed offensive by PL and VM forces. Such a suspension could be accomplished in stages or in one swoop, but if done in stages we must assume that we might eventually be forced to carry our pressures on Phouni through to a complete halt of aid and a withdrawal of MAAG teams.

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Neither Harriman nor Brown are yet prepared to put such a decision to the President and both are still pursuing other methods persuading Phouni which may prove successful. Brown's Embassy and Sullivan are continuing their efforts among other Vietnam leaders and Brown is preparing for discussions with Souvanna King and Phouni on his return to Vientiane. Harriman is investigating possibility of stimulating a request by Sarit to confer first with Harriman and then possibly with Harriman and Phouni together if results of first meeting warrant. Brown is also continuing with negotiations of Western ambassadors at Khang Khay.

The foregoing efforts will take some time, but I thought you could use advance warning to prepare for likelihood of request for authority to suspend assistance from Harriman and Brown.

In anticipation of such a request two intelligence investigations might be undertaken. First to evaluate the chance that Souvannavong might renew hostilities after suspension of help despite his indications to the contrary as reported by Falaize, and second what methods we might use

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during period of confusion following suspension to establish as rapidly as possible a new political figure on the right to replace Phouni. At present the situation is like New York city politics. It is difficult to get leaders to defect from a Tammany boss before his downfall; they only begin swarming afterwards.

I plan return Vientiane with Brown tomorrow and would expect remain there at least until results of current efforts are more clear. I would plan to be back before final decision on suspension is taken.

-End of Message-

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